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ABSTRACT

The key determinants of successful implementation of a teacher inservice education program are discussed. Strong motivation and perceived need for change on the part of the teachers themselves is a major factor in initiating a program. Other critical factors are group involvement, mutual support and feedback, external support, administrative leadership, nonthreatening evaluation, and a realistic overall design. (JD)

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TEACHER INITIATED IN-SERVICE

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It is important to understand the antecedents of this concept of teacher initiated in-service. The events leading to its conceptualization are perhaps more important than the explanation of the concept itself.

First a brief orientation to the province of Nova Scotia and our history of curriculum design and improvement. Nova Scotia contains as many people as the states of New Hampshire or Hawaii (approximately 800,000 people). Decisions of curriculum policy are made at the provincial level as much as they are, I believe, at the state level in the United States. Our federal constitution provides complete provincial jurisdiction over public education. Each of the ten Canadian provinces is represented by a Ministry of Education and it is from some arm of these ministries that curriculum policy emanates. Early curriculum policy statements reflected the notion that courses were content, and content, courses. Gaining attention are the intricacies of educational change, because provincial curriculum guides have more recently concentrated on the process of teaching. A virtually non-existant implementation stradegy has reduced the effectiveness of policy concerning the improvements of teacher behaviour. Recent studies have shown that years after the publication of provincial guidelines little or no implementation has occurred at the classroom level. This task force inherited the central guidelines approach to curriculum innovation. However, the apparent ineffectiveness of policy statements in and of themselves was a source of frustration as one became concerned for actual improvement; not the illusion of change.

Not only is it crucial for you to understand the traditional curriculum improvement procedures of our province, but of equal importance is the evolution of the ideas within the Task Force. We began as a group, required within two years to deliver curriculum improvement suggestions in the area of reading to our province's 600 junior high English teachers. The rationale was a collective cry for help by teachers receiving elementary students whose range of reading ability far exceeded secondary teaching abilities. Most of the teachers would have preferred that we clean up the elementary schools than suggest ways the junior high teachers could better cope. Our group's perception of the problem and the solutions, went through a typical growth sequence, from an initial focus on new materials and methods, to a focus on the process of relearning to teach; from junior high English teachers to all secondary and some elementary teachers; from a fragment of the school experience to a total school approach to literacy development. Within two years we had progressed from writing guidelines for reading in the content area workbooks for 600 junior high English teachers, to a comprehensive approach to literacy development involving 6000 secondary teachers. Ironically, as our plans became more and more complex and all encompassing in scope, our place of intervention shrunk from the whole Province to regions within the Province and finally to individual schools within those regions.

As the ends to which we aspired became more complex the traditional means of simply publishing answers to provincial curriculae problems appeared totally inappropriate. Had we stayed with the decision to prescribe new materials, guidelines might have been adequate but in and of themselves they were inadequate as a means

of communicating and implementing a school process for solving local literacy problems. One simply cannot hope to facilitate local problem solving by issuing a central government publication of curriculum guidelines for improvement.

A recent Harvard Business Review article suggested that successful change agents have in common their ability to develop a change strategy. The relative merits or the ethical implications of various strategies are debatable but, in business at least, one must have a plan to be successful at implementing an innovation. It became clear to us that we needed a plan for the implementation of literacy improvements and, much like the evolution of the ends to which we aspired, the suitable means changed over time. The aims were clear; to facilitate teacher improvement in the delivery of secondary literacy development and to leave the profession more self reliant than we had found them. We had no implementation deadline and could, therefore, attend to the highest of ethical standards.

The means of achieving our goals began in the publishing houses and ended with out own personal experience. In the beginning we believed the best means were prepacked, teacher-proof materials, the cure-all for secondary reading ills. We moved through a phase of supporting intensive central in-service for school teams representing various regions. Neither of these was satisfactory. While delivery would have improved in the short term with the introduction of reading rexts and workbooks, the effects would have left the profession more dependent on externally published materials. The more intensive three day in-service model

developed, artifically, the kind of relationship needed to facilitate complex change, but then proceeded to cut off the participants and return them to their various schools. The limitations of creating the ideal microcosm then returning people to their own, and different settings, were obvious. Our challenge was to develop a strategy for the implementarion of a process, by which staffs of schools could reach their own solutions, to their own local problems. The answer to this challenge lay before us. We recognized that if a school staff could go through the same learning and growth process as the various members of the task force had experienced, then the implementation of a response to the problem of literacy development would be automatic.

Our place of intervention became schools interested in solving their own problems and the process: teacher-initiated in-service. We observed one and piloted two such efforts, and were thus able to refine the process to its present conceptualization.

The following represent key determinants of successful implementation gleaned from recent American and Canadian studies. They are elements from which can be built successful change strategies.

1. Explicitness - the clearer the behavior demands of an innovation the more likely it will be successfully implemented.

2. Adoption process - the more voluntary the committment to implement the better.

3. History of previous interventions - the best strategy can fail if the hidden attitudes of teachers towards change are negative. Negativism may be the result of a series of bad experiences.

4. Characteristics of microcosm - the main characteristic is that the receiving group must be flexible and open to the mutual adaptation of innovation to local setting. Some interesting minor characteristics of teachers indicate highest change from younger and more self-directed professionals.

5. Characteristics of macrocosm - the forces swirling around the receiving unit - geopolitical in nature-must be understood before developing strategy. Power dispersing not power withholding - prove greater implementers.

6. Incentive - the motivation to change must be strong. Internal recognition of reward for efforts better than external sources of reward.

7. Feedback - accurate, honest, regular and appropriate feedback - a crucial determinant of success.

8. Meeting and planning time - one of the most crucial facilitators of change is the amount of regular planning, sharing and discussing time set aside during the first years of a project.

9. In-service - must be appropriate to the change and the needs of teachers, most effective when timed to coincide with committment to change.

10. Administrative leadership - principals, project coordinators are the gate keepers of change. Their style must reflect determinants if they are to be successful.

11. External support - money, time, space, resources must be provided when needed to facilitate the change process.

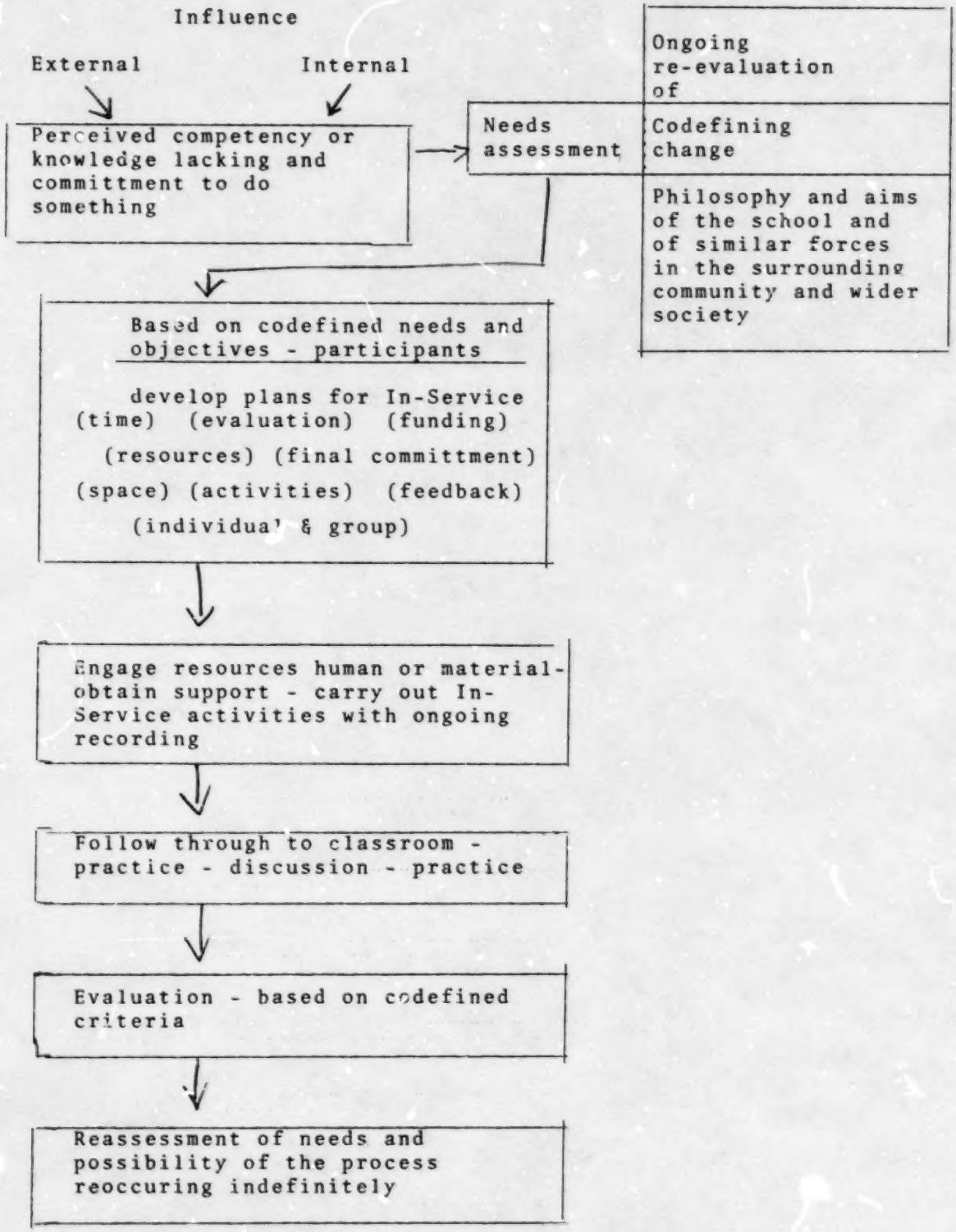
12. Perceived attributes of the innovation - teachers will choose to implement projects they perceive to be better than what they are presently doing - understandable.

13. Evaluation - accountability is essential but a wise leader must recognize the destructiveness of unrealistic expectations and subsequent evaluation. The degree to which a project has been implemented should determine the appropriate form of evaluative criteria.

14. Participation - the more teacher involvement in the design and choosing of a new idea the greater the likelihood of successful implementation.

15. Design of the implementation strategy - the overall design must account for all these variables both present and absent. It must be and be seen to be realistic to those involved.

Teacher Initiated In-Service


Influence
External
Internal
Perceived competency or knowledge lacking and committment to do something
Needs assessment
Ongoing re-evaluation of
Codefining change
Philosophy and aims of the school and of similar forces in the surrounding community and wider society
Based on codefined needs and objectives - participants
develop plans for In-Service
(time) (evaluation) (funding)
(resources) (final committment)
(space) (activities) (feedback)
(individua' & group)
Engage resources human or material- obtain support - carry out In-Service activities with ongoing recording
Follow through to classroom - practice - discussion - practice
Evaluation - based on codefined criteria
Reassessment of needs and possibility of the process reoccuring indefinitely

The process presented on the overhead is called teacher-initiated in-service. It is a process through which a group of teachers may proceed from initial awareness of a problem to resolution of that problem. Some event or influence either internal (day to day teaching experiences) or external (individuals or sources outside the day to day teaching) must serve to confront a teacher or group of teachers with an awareness of inadequacy in certain aspects of their role. From this perception of a weakness in competency, individual teachers form a group with the purpose of establishing a collective definition of what they need to resolve the concern, by way of knowledge or skills. By codefining what is needed each individual knows whether the group's evolving plans will be broad enough to include their own personal needs. Objectives are established and plans made for activities to meet those objectives. Choices must be made as to the format of the sessions; a suitable time frame (1/2 day to full university courses); resources both materials and/or personnel; suitable space; evaluative criteria; feedback mechanisms; sources of funding; provisions for individual as well as group needs, etc. The next stage is the one in which human resources are engaged, materials procured, final arrangements made and the in-service commences. Periodic needs assessments are a useful device which can be built into a program to ensure constant relevance. A time for classroom experimentation is part of the process and final evaluation is based on mutually agreed upon criteria established during the needs assessment phase.

This process once begun is potentially an endless awareness-action-evaluation-chain which incorporates the best aspects of problem solving and implementation determinants within the context of local and societal forces.

An example of this process in action may be found in the guide in the section on school change. As a task force we made two committments; to solve a problem with secondary literacy development and to leave the profession more self-reliant than we had found it. I believe, with the resources presented here today and this process for facilitating the implementation of improvements, we have taken a step towards actual classroom change.

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